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RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 7456

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - PUNTLAND PARLIAMENT ELECTS NEW SPEAKER

REF: NAIROBI 7

¶1. (U) Summary: Puntland's newly-seated Parliament elected a new Speaker on January 3. Member of Parliament Abdirashid Muhammad Hersi, from Mudug Region, was the only candidate and was elected unanimously. In accordance with the tradition of sharing power in Puntland, since the Speaker is from Mudug Region, the President and the Vice President should come from the Sool and Sanaag regions. Meanwhile, incumbent President Mohamud "Adde" Muse Hersi no longer appears to be guaranteed a victory. End summary.

One-Horse Race For Speaker,
New Power Distribution

¶2. (U) Puntland's Parliament, which was sworn in on January 1 (reftel), selected MP Abdirashid Muhammad Hersi as Speaker on January 3. Hersi was the only candidate for the post, and was elected unanimously. Salaad Hareed Ali and Hussein Haji Yusuf were elected as First and Second Vice Speakers, respectively. Hersi will guide Parliament through the process of selecting a President, currently scheduled for January 8.

¶3. (U) Hersi's election marks a departure from historical norms in Puntland politics. Previously, the presidency was held by someone from Puntland's predominantly Majertein clan Mudug or Bari regions, the vice-presidency was held by someone from Sool region (Dolbahante clan), and the Speaker's position was held by someone from Sanag region (Warsengeli clan). Local sources tell us that General Abdullahi Ilkajir, who hails from Sanag region, urged MPs from Sanag not to run for Speaker, in order to allow Ilkajir to remain in the running for the presidency. Hersi's election as Speaker should rule out any Mudug region natives becoming President or Vice President.

Incumbent Not Assured Victory

¶4. (U) The current President of Puntland, Mohamud "Adde" Muse Hersi reportedly has far less support from among the 66 new MP's than he had from their predecessors, largely due to Hersi's apparently mediocre performance over the past four years. Puntlanders are reportedly disappointed with the fact that, on Hersi's watch Puntland has become the base of a burgeoning piracy industry, which has resulted in a negative image of Puntland. In addition, Hersi's administration is accused of corruption and incompetent economic policies, such

as the printing of counterfeit Somali shillings and the resultant inflation. Also causing unhappiness is the disputed Sool region's partial capture in skirmishes with Somaliland and the October 29 terrorist attacks. Still, observers believe that his financial resources mean that Hersi cannot yet be written off.

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